

To: Abrams, Dan[Abrams.Dan@epa.gov]; Purchia, Liz[Purchia.Liz@epa.gov]; Harrison, Melissa[Harrison.Melissa@epa.gov]; Lee, Monica[Lee.Monica@epa.gov]; Allen, Laura[Allen.Laura@epa.gov]; Hull, George[Hull.George@epa.gov]; Reynolds, Thomas[Reynolds.Thomas@epa.gov]; Daguillard, Robert[Daguillard.Robert@epa.gov]; StClair, Christie[StClair.Christie@epa.gov]
Cc: Ludwigsen, Emily[Ludwigsen.Emily@epa.gov]
From: Gong, Kristiene
Sent: Tue 8/11/2015 8:54:57 PM
Subject: RE: Animas Spill Clips Aug 11, continued

Denver Post:

http://www.denverpost.com/environment/ci_28620723/sens-bennet-gardner-rep-tipton-urge-epa-chief

Bennet, Gardner, Tipton urge EPA chief to visit Animas River disaster

Congressional delegation unites in call for EPA to commit to full recovery; Gardner calls for Congressional hearings

By Bruce Finley

The Denver Post

POSTED: 08/11/2015 10:53:27 AM MDT12 COMMENTS| UPDATED: ABOUT 2 HOURS AGO

Colorado's senators and the congressman representing Durango area residents on Tuesday urged the Obama administration's EPA chief to visit the scene of the Animas River disaster and commit to a full economic and environmental recovery.

A letter from Sens. Cory Gardner and Michael Bennet and Rep. Scott Tipton asked EPA Administrator Gina McCarthy to visit La Plata and San Juan counties and hold a public meeting to discuss last week's Gold King Mine spill.

The EPA has acknowledged it caused the disaster while trying to address the problem of the mine, which for decades has been leaking acid heavy metals contaminants into Cement Creek.

"Local residents, recreationists, and business owners need to know that EPA will commit to a full cleanup of the accident and work to ensure the full environmental and economic recovery of the affected area," the letter said.

Six days ago, more than 3 million gallons of contaminated wastewater from the Gold King mine spilled into Cement Creek and the Animas River in southwestern Colorado. Gov. John Hickenlooper and top state natural resources and health officials are visiting the area and holding meetings with residents Tuesday.

Hickenlooper told one group Tuesday that the "fully expects there will be a process of accountability."

Hickenlooper said he was told McCarthy will visit the area, but didn't know when. He said the river, which is beginning to clear, will reopen in stages.

Gardner also issued a statement later Tuesday calling for Congressional hearings on the EPA's "insufficient response and to ensure that the EPA is held to the same recovery standards as the private sector."

Bennet, Gardner and Tipton said in their letter: "Residents remain uncertain as to the dangers posed by this spill, as well as the timeline and recovery plan EPA intends to execute.

"Gaining an on-the-ground understanding of the situation is important to EPA's response and area residents and officials would appreciate your in-person commitment to an expeditious and thorough cleanup and recovery. The individuals, families, and businesses impacted by EPA's accident deserve nothing less."

From: Gong, Kristiene

Sent: Tuesday, August 11, 2015 4:23 PM

To: Abrams, Dan; Purchia, Liz; Harrison, Melissa; Lee, Monica; Allen, Laura; Hull, George; Reynolds, Thomas; Daguillard, Robert; StClair, Christie

Cc: Ludwigsen, Emily
Subject: RE: Animas Spill Clips Aug 11, continued

Associated Press (via The Guardian):

<http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2015/aug/11/animas-river-spill-epa-anger>

Local anger swells at EPA over toxic gold mine spill in Animas River

Townspeople demand explanation over long-term effects of 3m gallons of waste to water supply, as Colorado and New Mexico make disaster declarations

Associated Press

Tuesday 11 August 2015 16.13 EDT

Townspeople watching millions of gallons of orange-colored mine waste flow through their communities demanded clarity on Tuesday about possible long-term threats to their water supply.

Colorado and New Mexico made disaster declarations for stretches of the Animas and San Juan rivers and the Navajo Nation declared an emergency as the toxic waste spread downstream toward Lake Powell in Utah.

EPA workers accidentally unleashed an estimated 3m gallons (11.36m liters) of mine waste, including high concentrations of arsenic, lead and other heavy metals, as they inspected the long-abandoned Gold King mine near Silverton, Colorado, on 5 August.

EPA administrator Gina McCarthy said on Tuesday in Washington DC that she takes full responsibility for the spill, which she said “pains me to no end”. She said the agency is working around the clock to assess the environmental impact.

EPA officials said the shocking orange plume has already dissipated and that the leading edge of the contamination cannot be seen in the downstream stretches of the San Juan River or Lake Powell.

But that has done little to ease concerns or quell anger.

The Navajos, whose nation covers parts of New Mexico, Utah and Arizona, shut down water intake systems and stopped diverting water from the San Juan River. Frustrated tribal council members echoed the sentiment of state officials, insisting that the federal government be held accountable.

The attorney generals of Utah, New Mexico and Colorado have been coordinating a response to protect their citizens and ensure “whatever remediation is necessary occurs as quickly as possible,” Utah Attorney General Sean Reyes said in a statement.

Utah governor Gary Herbert expressed disappointment with the EPA’s initial handling of the spill, but said the state has no plans for legal action. New Mexico Gov. Susana Martinez, however, said she would not take anything off the table and that the EPA should be held to the same standards as industry.

“Right now we have people preparing for a lawsuit if that is what we need to do,” she said in a Tuesday television interview.

Colorado governor John Hickenlooper spent Tuesday visiting a contaminated stretch of river.

The EPA has said the current flows too fast for the contaminants to pose an immediate health threat, and that the heavy metals will likely be diluted over time so that they don’t pose a longer-term threat, either.

Still, as a precautionary measure, the agency said stretches of the rivers would be closed for

drinking water, recreation and other uses at least through 17 August.

Dissolved iron is what turned the waste plume an alarming orange-yellow, a color familiar to old-time miners who call it “yellow boy”.

“The water appears worse aesthetically than it actually is, in terms of health,” said Ron Cohen, a civil and environmental engineering professor at the Colorado School of Mines.

Tests show some of the metals have settled to the bottom and would dissolve only if conditions became acidic, which Cohen said isn’t likely. He advises leaving the metals where they settle, and counting on next spring’s mountain snowmelt to dilute them more and flush them downstream.

No die-off of wildlife along the river has been detected. Federal officials say all but one of a test batch of fingerling trout deliberately exposed to the water survived over the weekend.

As a precaution, state and federal officials ordered public water systems to turn off intake valves as the plume passes. Boaters and fishing groups have been told to avoid affected stretches of the Animas and San Juan rivers, which are usually crowded with rafters and anglers in a normal summer.

Farmers also have been forced to stop irrigating, endangering their crops, and recreational businesses report losing thousands of dollars.

From: Gong, Kristiene

Sent: Tuesday, August 11, 2015 4:16 PM

To: Abrams, Dan; Purchia, Liz; Harrison, Melissa; Lee, Monica; Allen, Laura; Hull, George; Reynolds, Thomas; Daguillard, Robert; StClair, Christie

Cc: Ludwigsen, Emily

Subject: Animas Spill Clips Aug 11, continued

Washington Examiner:

<http://www.washingtonexaminer.com/epa-accepts-full-responsibility-for-colorado-river-spill/article/2570016>

EPA 'accepting full responsibility' for Colorado river spill

By ZACK COLMAN • 8/11/15 2:49 PM

Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Gina McCarthy said her agency is "accepting full responsibility" for a contractor that accidentally spilled millions of gallons of polluted water last week into western Colorado's Animas River, where cleanup efforts are ongoing as federal officials seek to maintain contamination.

The Aug. 5 spill occurred when an agency contractor operating heavy machinery punctured a barrier holding back water containing mining tailings at the Gold King Mine near Silverton, Colo. Three million gallons of water polluted with heavy metals poured into the river and turned it orange, and the tainted water spread into New Mexico and Utah.

Republicans and local residents have attacked the agency for what they called a slow response to the spill. McCarthy, who said that she expects lawsuits, said the agency is "absolutely deeply sorry" and is using the "full depth and breadth of the agency" to address the "tragic" event.

"I understand people's frustration, but we have our researchers and our scientists working around the clock," she said at a Washington event hosted by think tank Resources for the Future. She added that there have been "no reported cases of anyone's health being compromised" and that water pollution levels are on a "downward trajectory to pre-event conditions."

GOP lawmakers on Capitol Hill want to know more about how EPA handled the situation. House Science, Space and Technology Committee Chairman Lamar Smith, R-Texas, wrote to McCarthy on Monday requesting a briefing on the incident.

"It is concerning that the agency charged with ensuring the nation's waters are clean is reportedly responsible for the toxic water spill at Gold King Mine. A spill of this magnitude could be devastating for the families who live nearby and depend on the Animas River in their daily lives," Smith wrote.

Colorado's top health official said Tuesday that preliminary tests showed the spill "doesn't appear" to pose health risks, according to news reports. But the river, which is a drinking water source and recreation hotspot, remains closed as the EPA and local officials conduct more tests.

"Clearly we have added responsibility here. But we're working with the state of Colorado, we're working with the state of New Mexico, we're working with the local officials in a joint command center. They are part of the decision-making here and we want to keep it that way," McCarthy told reporters after the event.

"Right now we made sure that the downstream intakes for public water supplies were protected. And we're also working with folks that have private drinking wells along there to actually work with each one of them to provide bottled water," McCarthy added.